

10/08/21 Friday

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'Shot Ourselves in the Foot': Graham Says GOP 'Blinked' on Debt Ceiling Opposition Pledge
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Republicans are licking their wounds on Friday after 11 senators crossed the aisle the day prior to vote for increasing the debt ceiling after pledging for months not to support the Democrats' political agenda. However, they will soon have the chance to fight again, as the increase will only last until December.

In a surprising move on Thursday, 61 senators - all 50 Democrats plus 11 Republicans - moved to [clear the way for a vote](#) on raising the debt ceiling. In the vote that followed, the 50 Democrats succeeded in passing the bill as 48 voted against it and two abstained.

In exchange for their support, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) changed the increase to be by a specific dollar amount - \$480 billion - instead of the outright suspension the Democrats had sought. The increase will last the federal government until December.

Speaking to Fox News' [Sean Hannity on Thursday](#) evening after the vote, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), who was not one of the 11 aisle-crossers, said the GOP had "blinked" after two months of promising their supporters they would oppose the Democratic agenda.

"We screwed up. For two months, we promised our base and the American people that we would not help the Democratic Party raise the debt ceiling so they could spend \$3.5 to \$5 trillion through reconciliation," he told Hannity. "At the end of the day, we blinked."

"Two things have happened: We let our people down, and we made Democrats believe that we are all talk and no action. At the end of the day, every Republican voted against raising the debt ceiling, every Democratic senator voted for it. But we had a process in place. We made a promise, for two months, that we would make them do it without our help and we folded, and I hate that. We're in a hole; we've got to dig out of this hole and we can. We shot ourselves in the foot tonight, but we will revisit this issue in December," he added.

When Hannity pressed him on why Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) had buckled at the last minute, Graham said the Democrats had threatened to invoke the ["nuclear option."](#) a parliamentary procedure that would annul the filibuster rule. "We cannot live like that," he said.

"When President Trump was in power, he asked us to change the rules every day, wanting us to get our way, and I said 'no.' So I have no sympathy for the Democratic Party threatening to use the filibuster to implement their socialist agenda," Graham added. "At the end of the day, we cannot be extorted and live this way. We should have stood our ground and played this out. I don't believe they would have blown up the Senate over this."

The filibuster has been an essential tool for Senate Republicans to stonewall much of Biden's political agenda, including the [massive infrastructure bill](#) currently being debated, as well as the American Families Plan and the Equality Act. The rule allows lawmakers to continue debate

indefinitely, preventing a bill from being brought to a vote, and can be overridden by a 60-vote supermajority.

Things can change quickly in Capitol Hill politics, as the sudden debt ceiling deal proves, but as late as Wednesday, West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, a moderate Democrat seen as a kingmaker for any Senate deal, [said he would be](#) against invoking the nuclear option to force the debt ceiling bill through.

Raising the debt ceiling allows the federal government to borrow more money, which is used to both finance its programs, as well as to service the interest on the existing debt. If the ceiling had not been raised, the US would have faced a default on its debts, something it's never done before that could seriously affect its credit rating.

Earlier this week, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who formerly chaired the Federal Reserve, the US's state bank, warned that if the debt ceiling wasn't raised by October 18, it would plunge the US into an economic recession and undermine the world's confidence in the US dollar as a reserve currency.

"It would be catastrophic to not pay the government's bills, for us to be in a position where we lack the resources to pay the government's bills," [Yellen told CNBC's](#) Andrew Sorkin on Tuesday. "It really undermines confidence in the full faith and credit of the United States, our willingness to stand behind our debts, and [to] make sure that we pay them."

The debt ceiling isn't an inherent part of American politics, either: it was created in 1917 as the US government sold massive amounts of Liberty Bonds to finance its entry into the First World War. Since then, it has been increased more than 100 times and presently stands at \$28.5 trillion. Unless the federal government ends its annual deficit spending - either by slashing costs or raising taxes and tariffs - the US national debt will steadily increase.

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'That's Progress': Month After Federal Unemployment Program Ended Was Worst for Job Growth of 2021

By - Morgan Artyukhina

In the first month after the Biden administration allowed a pandemic-era unemployment benefit boost used by 8 million people to expire, the US economy recorded its slowest increase since US President Joe Biden took office in January.

According to a [new jobs report](#) published by the US Department of Labor on Friday, the US economy only added 194,000 new jobs in September - the smallest number this year and just barely half the 366,000 added in August.

"Jobs up, wages up, unemployment down. That's progress," Biden said on Friday.

Technically, the unemployment rate declined to 4.8% from 5.2% at the end of August, but that was in part due to people leaving the labor force entirely, meaning they have been without work for so long, they are no longer actively looking for a job. According to the report, there are still 6 million people not counted in the labor force who want a job, in addition to the 7.7 million officially unemployed.

The report also notes that long-term unemployed people, who have not had a job for more than six months, stands at 2.7 million and accounts for 34.5% of all unemployed people in September.

"Employment is slowing when it should be picking up because we're still on the course set by the virus," Diane Swonk, chief economist for the accounting firm Grant Thornton, told the [New York Times](#). Biden struck a similar tone, saying that the Delta variant-driven outbreak had peaked in early September, but that daily new cases had decreased by one-third by the end of the month, signaling the potential for positive change on the horizon.

However, future promises are likely of little comfort for the 8 million people who lost their federal unemployment benefits last month. The program was [allowed to expire](#) on September 6 without an extension, even though the deadline was set months ago, before the ultra-transmissible Delta variant of COVID-19 drove a new nationwide outbreak.

[Writing to congressional](#) leaders in mid-August "on behalf of President Biden," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Labor Secretary Marty Walsh said the increased federal unemployment program "was always intended to be temporary and it is appropriate for that benefit boost to expire." [Biden encouraged states](#) to continue to pay out boosted unemployment checks using remaining federal funds, but more than half [had already ended](#) their federal programs months earlier.

Conservatives argued that the unemployment aid programs were artificially inflating the unemployment rate, allowing workers to remain on the government dole instead of going out and [finding jobs](#). Friday's report seems to make a mockery of those claims.

The federal unemployment benefit wasn't the only pandemic aid program the Democrats let end, either. Federal [bans on foreclosure](#) and [eviction were also](#) allowed to lapse without renewal as well, along with a moratorium on student loan payments.

An end to unemployment benefits, with such a large percentage of recipients being long-term unemployed, means that millions more are now exposed to the danger of eviction. Already, 1.4 million Americans said they [expect to be evicted](#) in the next two months, with another 2.3 million saying it was "somewhat likely" they would soon lose their homes. Nationwide, an estimated 7.7 million households are behind on rent, meaning as many as 15 million could become unhoused. Pandemic relief bills passed in December 2020 and March 2021 set aside \$46 billion for paying off renters' debts and \$10 billion for helping underwater federally-financed mortgages. However, due to Byzantine bureaucratic application programs, just 11% of the rental aid and even less of the mortgage aid have actually been paid out. The program's catastrophic failure has helped fuel a new call by working-class activists for the government to simply [cancel unpaid rent debt](#) entirely.

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US to Accept WHO-Approved COVID-19 Vaccines for International Visitors - CDC
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the US' national public health agency, said Friday it would begin accepting all COVID-19 vaccines approved by the World Health Organization (WHO) for emergency use.

"Six vaccines that are FDA [US Food and Drug Administration] authorized/approved or listed for emergency use by WHO will meet the criteria for travel to the US," a spokesperson for the CDC told Reuters.

At present, the [WHO has approved](#) six vaccines for emergency use. Three are already in use in the US: Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine, Moderna's, and Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine. The rule change will now also include the regular Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, as well as the specific formulation used by India's Serum Institute, known by the name CoviShield; China's two most popular vaccines, Sinopharm's BiBP vaccine and SinoVac's CoronaVac vaccine, are also included.

A WHO [spokesperson said earlier](#) on Friday the international health agency was "near" to approving the Sputnik V vaccine, made by Russia's Gamaleya Institute. Russian Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said last week that only paperwork remained.

The rule change means international visitors who received a number of COVID-19 vaccines not available in the United States will now be recognized as being vaccinated against the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This will open up travel to the US as well as entry to venues that [require proof of vaccination](#), which has been mandated in several US cities and implemented on an ad hoc basis at venues in many others.

Last week, the [White House announced](#) that in November, travelers from the European Union, China, Iran, South Africa, Brazil and India would be allowed to enter the country again, provided they can demonstrate proof of vaccination. Aside from a select few countries, including Mexico, Canada, Japan, and Singapore, travel to the United States during the 18 months since the pandemic began has been almost totally restricted.

Worldwide, about 3.64 billion people have been immunized against COVID-19, or 47.5% of humanity, according to data compiled by the [New York Times](#). Of them, 1.1 billion are Chinese, the vast majority of whom will no longer be barred from the US on account of vaccination status. Further, about 77% of total shots have gone to residents of middle and upper-income countries, while just 0.5% have gone to lower-income countries.

While aside from the unapproved Sputnik V, the vaccines now approved are the most widely used around the globe. However, several other vaccines are also in use in smaller numbers, ranging from Bharat Biotech's Covaxin vaccine being used in seven countries, including India where it was developed, to others used just in the country where they were developed, such as Kazakhstan's QazVac and Iran's COVIran Barakat. None of the five vaccines developed by Cuba, which are beginning to be shipped to other countries like Venezuela and Iran, have been approved by the WHO.

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Beijing, Moscow Urge UN Make 'Mobile Biomedical Teams', Probe US Biolabs for BWC Treaty Compliance

By - Morgan Artyukhina

Amid continued US accusations that SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, escaped from a Chinese biolab in Wuhan, the Chinese and Russian governments have called on the United Nations to ensure the US is following international conventions on bioweapons. During a Thursday meeting of an arms control committee discussion of the United Nations' Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction (BWC), the foreign ministers of Russia and China called attention to the US' absence from the BWC Treaty's verification protocols regime.

Geng Shuang, China's deputy permanent representative to the UN, proposed a legally binding protocol be added to the BWC, and that under the aegis of a monitoring mechanism, "mobile biomedical teams" should be deployed to investigate the use of biological agents and to "help combat epidemics of various origins."

While recent events surrounding the search for the origins of COVID-19 have given the proposal additional relevance, it is by no means the first time it's been pitched. [Russia made the same](#) suggestions in 2018, a year before the pandemic began.

The treaty currently has no verification protocols and is little more than a gentlemen's agreement not to build or test bioweapons. This is unlike other treaties, such as the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention, under which the US has [destroyed much](#) of its stockpiles of mustard gas, VX, and [sarin projectiles](#) - albeit years later than they agreed to. However, the US did destroy its existing bioweapons stock between 1971 and 1972, under orders from then-US President Richard Nixon - notably before the BWC came into existence in 1975.

"The Russian Federation and China note with concern that over the past two decades the BWC States Parties, despite the wishes of the overwhelming majority, have failed to reach an agreement on resuming the multilateral negotiations on the Protocol to the Convention, suspended in 2001 when the United States unilaterally withdrew from this process despite the fact that the consensus was almost reached," the China-Russia [joint statement reads](#).

"Consequently, and also in the light of rapid advances in the field of science and technology with dual-use capabilities, the risk of biological agents being used as weapons has increased."

The statement notes that the US operates more than 200 biological laboratories located in other countries, noting they "function in opaque and non-transparent manner" and raise "serious concerns and questions among the international community over its compliance with the BWC."

"The two sides share the view that such activities pose serious risks for the national security of the Russian Federation and China, and are detrimental to the security of relevant regions," they said.

"Given the fact that the United States and its allies do not provide any meaningful information on those military biological activities that could allay concerns of the international community, the Russian Federation and China urge the United States and its allies to act in an open, transparent and responsible manner, by informing properly on its military biological activities carried out overseas and on their national territory, and supporting the resumption of

negotiations on a legally binding protocol to the BWC with effective verification mechanism, so as to ensure their compliance with the BWC.”

US Biolabs Once Drove Weapons Program

Like many nations, the US vigorously pursued biological and chemical weapons programs during and after the First World War. By the time President Nixon ordered their destruction, the US had developed stockpiles of six biological weapons, including anthrax, botulism, tularemia, brucellosis, Q-fever, and Venezuelan equine encephalitis virus, as well as staphylococcal enterotoxin B, a toxin produced by staphylococcus aureus bacteria, as an incapacitating agent. However, it also had research programs into more than 20 other potential weapons, including smallpox, rinderpest, typhus, dengue fever, yellow fever, bird flu, and plague.

Moreover, the US is believed to have [used biological agents](#) during the Korean War and against Cuba in the early 1960s, and is known to have [conducted widespread testing](#) of biological agents and various components of biowarfare on its own population.

Early in 2020, a conspiracy theory arose in the United States that SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, had been a test subject leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology in central China, calls for the World Health Organization to probe the Wuhan lab began, as well. The Biden administration also launched its own probe, which [found in late August](#) that the virus was most likely natural and entered the human population via natural means, not a bioweapon or escaped lab test subject.

However, the conspiracy theory has persisted, helping to fuel anti-China attitudes in the United States by suggesting some kind of coverup. In response, [Beijing began calling](#) for the US' many biolabs, which are located both in the US and [scattered around](#) the globe, to be probed as potential sources of the outbreak, as well. In particular, [Fort Detrick](#), once the center of the Pentagon's bioweapons program and today houses several agencies focused on biodefense and research into some of the world's deadliest diseases, has had several problems with leaks, including the anthrax used in a series of mail attacks in late 2001.

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10 Injured After Houthi Drone Attack at King Abdullah Airport in Saudi Arabia's Jazan - Reports By - Nevin Brown

This comes after Houthis launched an explosive-laden UAV towards Abha International Airport in the Kingdom's southwestern Asir Province, injuring four airport employees.

An explosive-laden drone, reportedly fired by Yemeni Houthi rebels, has struck the King Abdullah International Airport in Jazan, Saudi Arabia, the Saudi-led coalition [announced](#) on late Friday.

Initial reports suggested there were at least five injured as a result of the attack, but state media later raised that number to 10.

Brigadier General Turki al-Maliki, the official spokesman for the coalition forces, said via state media that there have been minor injuries among passengers and airport workers, adding that the incident is being followed up by the requisite authorities.

First pictures allegedly showing the aftermath of the attack have emerged on social media.

The Houthis often use drones with explosives to [attack Saudi border areas](#).

Yemen has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces, led by President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, and the Houthi rebels for several years, with the Houthi movement taking control of large parts in the country's north.

Since March 2015, the Saudi-led Arab alliance, working in cooperation with Hadi's forces, has been conducting air, land and sea operations against the rebels, who control the capital of Sanaa and large areas in northern and western Yemen. By 2019, the conflict was deemed a military stalemate.

At the same time, the developments have been largely described as a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The two regional powers have been vying for political and economic influence in the region while avoiding serious confrontations.

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Western Europe May Not Weather the Winter Without Russian Gas

By - Nevin Brown

According to analysis from Wood Mackenzie, a global research and consultancy firm, the only way for Western Europe to weather a cold winter will be through an additional influx of Russian gas.

Western Europe finds itself in a precarious position. Over the summer, the region experienced record heat and wasn't able to generate as much energy from wind plants. To power the region, energy suppliers had to dip into their stores of gas.

In the summer months, Europe usually builds up a surplus of gas to be taken from in the winter. Entering October, the region [is usually above 90% of their storage capacity](#), but is [projected to be at 78% by the end of October](#), a record low.

Gazprom, a Russian state-owned gas company, supplies over 40% of the natural gas in the European Union. The company has been non-committal over increasing supply, and may hold the keys to keeping Europe warm over the winter months.

Wood Mackenzie's report does indicate that if Europe faces a relatively normal winter, they won't hit zero on their gas reserves, but it would still likely cause prices to skyrocket. However, a worst-case scenario could see Western Europe out in the cold.

In that situation, a cold winter in both Western Europe, Russia, and Asia could lead to a shortage of gas. With Gazprom favoring the Russian market in that instance, it'll leave the rest of Europe and Asia to fight over the leftovers. Meteorologists believe this could be [yet another weak La Nina year](#), which has been linked to cooler winters in Europe.

European leaders have been negotiating with Russia and Gazprom to increase the supply of gas to avoid a situation where an energy disaster is a mere cubic meter away. If Nord Stream 2, a gas pipeline through the Baltic sea that goes from Russia to Germany, is operational for this winter, it could help Europe overcome a worst-case scenario. For Western Europe, the winter of 2021-22 could come down to how much gas flows from the east.

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Virginia Republicans Seize on Parental Rights in Weeks of Final Race
By - Adriana Montes

Virginia Republican gubernatorial nominee Glenn Youngkin wasted no time zeroing in on education and parents' rights issues ahead of November elections.

Youngkin and his Republican allies immediately turned a comment made by his Democratic opponent, Terry McAuliffe, into an ad during the [second and final debate](#) between the two at last week's gubernatorial debate, in which he said he did not believe parents should tell schools what to teach students.

"I'm not going to let parents come into schools and actually take books out and make their own decision," McAuliffe said over what should be taught in schools.

"I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach," the former governor later added.

The comments, after getting considerable publicity within conservative media — in less than 24 hours of the soundbite being seized by Youngkin's team — quickly became a [Youngkin ad](#) that's already become a staple of the candidate's pitch in the closing weeks of the race.

"If you had any doubt... any doubt whatsoever... about Terry McAuliffe's principles, he laid them bare last week when he said, he said parents do not have a right to be involved in their kid's education," Youngkin said earlier this month.

Youngkin's campaign hopes to focus on education issues, ranging from what should be taught in public schools to issues that conservatives sounded off on — in particular critical race theory, transgender rights at schools and debates over mask mandates.

The ultimate goal, however, is to cut into McAuliffe's support with swing voters in key areas like the vote-rich Northern Virginia suburbs near Washington, DC.

Republicans and conservatives in the state have pointed to the effect lockdowns, which they tie to Democratic leadership in Virginia, have had on the state's students.

The Virginia Department of Education [released data](#) that revealed test scores dropped significantly during the pandemic, with one Republican operative blaming Democrats for the mediocre test grades for not allowing kids back into school immediately.

Youngkin's campaign [reportedly](#) fired back at McAuliffe's comments after the debate, saying they would have "serious ramifications."

"It spans beyond Republicans," the spokesperson said. "It's folks that care about education."

McAuliffe and his allies are brushing off the attacks from the other side, pointing to a study conducted by the [Virginia Education Association that found](#) that Youngkin's economic plan would lead to roughly \$54 billion in lost aid to public schools.

"I'm not quite sure the point that Glenn's trying to make," McAuliffe said during a press call earlier this week.

"We have school boards and the state board of education that makes these important decisions, and of course, parents are involved and electing members to the school board. That's how it works here in Virginia."

A Washington Post-Schar School survey released last month [found](#) that 45 percent of voters said they trusted McAuliffe to do a better job of handling education, while 37 percent said the same about Youngkin.

"Why are we doing this to our students? All we want to do is give them a quality education," McAuliffe told CNN during an interview aired Wednesday, in which he labeled Youngkin as a "dog whistle."

"They're desperate. This all goes back to critical race theory, which is not taught here in Virginia."

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Top 10 Halloween Movies
By - Adriana Montes

As the creepiest holiday of the year is approaching, we recommend you put aside your carved pumpkin for a second and check out the list of best horror movies to give you chills on Halloween. Don't forget the popcorn!

1. The Exorcist (1973)

Coming in at number one, William Friedkin's 1973 film "The Exorcist" caused quite the stir with unsettling scenes that led cinemagoers to faint, vomit and pass out.

This horror classic follows the demonic possession of a young girl named Regan (Linda Blair), and her desperate mother's (Ellen Burstyn) attempt to save her through an exorcism. The speaking in reverse, sinister moving of objects and Regan twisting her head were hard to stomach for some viewers. The titular exorcism is performed by a young and an old priest willing to give their lives to free Regan from an evil spirit proclaiming itself to be the Devil.

And if the film wasn't scary enough, several surprising incidents, a freak fire and deaths of at least four people led to claims that the film was "cursed," and many would agree.

You can't call yourself a scary movie buff unless you've had the chance to walk the Exorcist Steps, located on 3600 Prospect Street NW in Georgetown, Washington DC. They were featured in the scene in which the character Father Karras (Jason Miller) fell to his death down the stairs from a nearby house.

2. Carrie (1976)

Brian De Palma's 1976 adaptation of Stephen King's debut novel was released a mere two years after it was published. The cutting-edge film depicts a lonely teenager (the distractingly attractive Sissy Spacek) who discovers that she has telekinetic powers that put a dent in the senior prom. Some call the last scene a "menstrual apocalypse" that gave viewers a final scare to keep them shivering on the way home.

3. The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974)

A top-ranked slasher in American horror. The story follows a young woman named Sally (Marilyn Burns) and her paraplegic brother Franklin (Paul A. Partain) who, after she hears that their grandfather's grave may have been vandalized, sets out to investigate along with some friends. After a detour to their family's old farmhouse, they discover a group of crazed, vicious outcasts living next door. The group is attacked one by one by the chainsaw-wielding slasher, Leatherface. The giant madman then embarks on a bloody spree, killing Sally's entire troupe as she is held hostage inside the home before she escapes in the movie's climax.

4. Halloween (1978)

John Carpenter's ingenious 1978 film "Halloween" is easily one of the most influential horror films — especially for introducing tropes that involve a killer who was somehow wronged in the past looking for their revenge through wholesale murder. Lastly, there is a single victim who escapes alive at the end. Fifteen years after murdering his sister on Halloween night 1963, Michael Myers escapes from a mental hospital and returns to the small town of Haddonfield, Illinois to kill again.

5. The Shining (1980)

Its tracking shots of Danny riding his tricycle along the hotel's corridors made "The Shining" among the first productions to exploit the true potential of horror. Stanley Kubrick's film is a creepy, unnerving, deeply engaging cinematic adaptation of Stephen King's beloved novel, in which supernatural malignancy reigns and mental stability are overturned by an awry environment. Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) becomes winter caretaker at the isolated Overlook Hotel in Colorado, hoping to cure his writer's block. As the family heads to an isolated hotel for the winter, a sinister presence influences the father into violence, while his psychic son sees horrific forebodings from both past and future.

6. Friday the 13th (1980)

If you ever pondered the idea of going to summer camp, chances are Jason Voorhees and the "Friday the 13th" franchise had something to do with your fear of going. This golden-age era slasher film suffered criticism for the violence, gruesome deaths, and graphic sexual content — all involving teens — depicted in the film. Nevertheless, this first storyline does not actually involve Jason Voorhees in his iconic hockey mask at Camp Crystal Lake, but instead his mother Pamela (Betsy Palmer) seeking vengeance against the camp.

7. A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984)

Reality and fantasy meet in unsettling ways in the classic slasher film series that begins with Wes Craven's "A Nightmare on Elm Street," a 1984 horror film that depicts a monstrous spirit of a slain child murderer, Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund), that seeks revenge by invading the dreams of teenagers whose parents were responsible for his untimely death. After watching this film, horror fans will be too afraid to fall asleep.

8. Scream (1996)

Wes Craven's suspenseful horror film "Scream" uses a tongue-in-cheek approach combined with a bloody brand of straightforward scares as the anonymous caller in the prologue, known as Ghostface, preys on teenagers. And as the body count begins to rise, one girl and her friends find themselves contemplating the rules of horror films as they find themselves living in a real-life one.

9. Hocus Pocus (1993)

“Hocus Pocus” is a 1993 American horror fantasy comedy film that was released by Disney and directed by Kenny Ortega. It tells the story of pranksters who inadvertently conjure up three diabolical witches from seventeenth-century Salem for a night of fun and comic chaos. “Hocus Pocus” has become a family-friendly, all-time Halloween classic.

10. The Conjuring (2013)

“The Conjuring” is a more modern horror film that managed to do something so few supernatural horror films ever accomplish... to truly terrify. Directed by James Wan (“Saw,” “Insidious”) and written by Chad and Carey Hayes, the film stars Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga as the real-life ghost hunters Ed and Lorraine Warren. The film chronicles the alleged experiences of the Perron family in the 1970s and the Warrens’ attempts to help rid the home of an unwanted demonic presence.

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Scientists ‘Create’ World’s Coldest Temperature Inside Lab
By - Adriana Montes

Scientists from four universities in Germany have created the coldest temperature ever recorded in a lab — 38 trillionths of a degree above absolute zero — while researching the wave properties of atoms.

Experts from the University of Bremen reportedly managed to manipulate a cloud of atoms to the point where they were virtually static, producing one of the coldest places in the universe for a few seconds. Bringing them to a near standstill allowed the German team to achieve a remarkably low temperature.

The findings have been [published](#) in the journal Physical Review Letters.

Absolute zero, technically known as zero kelvins, equals -273.15 degrees Celsius, or -459.67 Fahrenheit, and marks the spot on the thermometer where a system reaches its lowest possible energy, or thermal motion. It is reportedly the coldest temperature theoretically possible to reach.

The team reportedly warned this could have significant implications for our understanding of quantum mechanics, as the colder the temperature, the more peculiar matter acts.

The temperature this low cannot be detected by any thermometer, so they had to base the measurement on the lack of kinetic movement of the observed particles. The mechanism used to detect the temperature is known as a time-domain matter-wave lens system, and can see matter behaving like a wave.

The team used a magnetic lens to study the waves, allowing them to shape a quantum gas and use it to make a focused matter-wave they could use to control and monitor its behavior.

Quantum gas, also known as Bose-Einstein condensate, is much less predictable than regular gas that’s made of a loose arrangement of particles.

“By combining an excitation of a Bose-Einstein condensate (BEC) with a magnetic lens, we form a time-domain matter-wave lens system,” the researchers [reportedly](#) wrote. “The focus is tuned

by the strength of the lensing potential. By placing the focus at infinity, we lower the total internal kinetic energy of a BEC to 38 pK.”

The researchers say future experiments could make the particles get even slower, and last at that point for up to 17 seconds, allowing for more detailed study.

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Three Decades Later, German Mushrooms Still Contaminated by Chernobyl Radiation
By - Adriana Montes

According to a German food safety regulator, those who may be tempted to rummage around Munich's countryside have been warned to avoid picking blueberries, cranberries, and certain fungi to reduce their exposure to elevated concentrations of the caesium-137 and caesium-134 isotopes bearing the characteristic signature of the Chernobyl blast.

As a result of the 1986 Chernobyl reactor accident, around 95% of wild mushroom samples collected in Germany are still highly contaminated with dangerous levels of radioactive material, the federal office for consumer protection and food safety (BVL) [announced](#) on Friday.

Scientists tested 74 samples and confirmed that none of them exceeded the legal limit of 600 becquerels of radiation per kg.

The contamination of mushrooms depends on both the caesium-137 level — an unstable isotope with a half-life of 30 years — near the mycelium and the special accumulation capacity of the respective mushroom species.

The Chernobyl reactor, located in what is now northern Ukraine, emitted nuclear waste into the atmosphere after an uncontrolled nuclear chain reaction occurred, spreading a huge amount of airborne radioactive contamination across the continent and [causing a spike in cancers](#) in the immediate region.

To this day, the Ukrainian government is working on dismantling and decommissioning the power station.

Wild mushrooms are known to show contamination for much longer than other agricultural products. This is due to radioactive material that lingered in forests because their ecosystem recycled nutrients so efficiently, BVL said.

[The long-term impact](#) of the nuclear disaster caused widespread fear of nuclear power and strengthened anti-nuclear sentiments. A majority of Germans were concerned about the risks of the technology, triggering a decision shortly after the accident at Japan's Fukushima plant in 2011 to abandon it altogether.

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Wild Theory Emerges About Brian Laundrie Hiding Under Flower Bed at Parents' Home

By - Adriana Montes

Laundrie was last seen on September 14 entering the Carlton Reserve in Florida, where he allegedly went for a hike. The 23-year old remains a person of interest in the death of his girlfriend, Gabby Petito, whose body was found in a Wyoming national forest.

The hunt for clues as to the whereabouts of Brian Laundrie took a turn for the bizarre after several internet sleuths peddled a conspiracy theory indicating that he could be hiding beneath a flower bed in his parents' backyard in Florida.

Drone footage that has been widely shared online allegedly captured Chris and Roberta Laundrie, the 23-year-old fugitive's parents, gardening and tending to an empty flower bed. After the video was quickly removed, some began to claim that Laundrie could be hiding in a bunker under the flower bed nearly three weeks on from his last known sighting.

Disclaimer: I'm not saying there is anybody under that flower bed, what I am saying is that there is definitely a hand reaching out for some thing. Just watch. Stranger things have happened.

[#BrianLaundrie pic.twitter.com/zv5lFxlws5](#)

— Bethany Victoria (@owlisquiet1) [October 6, 2021](#)

One TikTok user, charlienovasite, posted a [video](#) in TikTok where she showed her viewers slow motion and zoomed-in portions of drone footage, saying: "There is definitely someone there. You cannot change my mind."

While a reality TV star is one of several on the trail of the 23-year-old, a former FBI agent has [reportedly](#) warned that Laundrie may have already left the state.

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'He's Got Some Allergies': Psaki Insists Biden's Chronic Cough Is Nothing Serious

By - Adriana Montes

Joe Biden, who turns 79 next month, was seen frequently hacking at an event held at the White House lawn with Interior Secretary Deb Haaland.

Get that man an Allegra..

Just weeks after [receiving](#) his COVID-19 booster shot, President Biden's ailing cough raised concern Friday during public remarks and a White House event — where he was seen persistently coughing and clearing his throat. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki assured reporters that Biden's cough is the result of allergies and not a [more serious medical condition](#).

"He's doing great. He has got some allergies," Psaki responded to a shouted question from journalist Brian Karen, as she walked away from the podium at her daily briefing.

Biden's recurring cough has been attributed in the past to the effects of gastric reflux or to a lingering cold by his doctor.

Dr. Kevin C. O'Connor [reportedly](#) conducted and released a medical report for Biden during his campaign in December 2019, declaring Biden "a healthy, vigorous, 77-year-old male, who is fit to successfully execute the duties of the presidency."

At the time of the report, Biden was under treatment for gastroesophageal reflux and seasonal allergies.

The doctor wrote that the stomach-acid reflux may “contribute to occasional cough and sinus congestion” and that “[Biden] has received endoscopy to rule out any more significant disease.” NBC News reporter Kelly O’Donnell questioned Psaki about it just last month after Biden’s cough repeatedly raised health concerns.

“Many of us were in the East Room watching the president. We’ve seen him on many occasions where he has a repeated cough. What is the situation with that cough? And is that a concern?” the journalist asked Psaki.

“It’s not a concern,” Psaki responded. “We have a doctor who travels with him, obviously, who checks in if there is — it is ever warranted.”

O’Donnell pressed Psaki further, asking her if there was any “explanation for why he coughed so frequently in situations like that.”

Psaki’s response was that she “didn’t think it was an issue of concern.”

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College Music Professor Reportedly Steps Down After Showing Students ‘Blackface’ Othello
By - Adriana Montes

Sheng was accused of rendering the classroom an “unsafe” space when he screened the 1965 version of Shakespeare’s Othello in class as part of a lesson to “show how the opera composer Giuseppe Verdi had adapted Shakespeare’s play into an opera.” In the film, Laurence Olivier, a white actor, wore blackface to portray the protagonist Othello.

A renowned University of Michigan professor who has taught at the school since 1995 has been removed from his post after a student complained about him showing the 1965 film Othello starring Oscar-nominated acting legend Laurence Olivier in blackface, US media reported. Sheng, who has been at the university for 26 years, apologized for making his students feel uncomfortable, and recalled a list of occasions when he had worked with ‘people of color’ throughout his career in an effort to support diversity.

Students loudly rejected his apology, reportedly demanding that the university fire him. As the administration looks into the matter, Sheng has stepped down from his role for the time being, which students considered ‘the bare minimum’ that the professor should do.

According to a [report](#), Olivia Cook, a freshman student, said she thought there was something “strange” about the film after noticing the blackface portrayal played by Academy Award winner Olivier.

“I was stunned,” Cook [told The Michigan Daily](#).

“In such a school that preaches diversity and making sure that they understand the history of people of color in America, I was shocked Sheng would show something like this in something that’s supposed to be a safe space.”

Blackface portrayal is considered by many to be akin to a racial caricature.

David Leonard, chair of Washington State University's department of critical culture, gender, and race studies, explained 'blackface' in his 2012 [Huffington Post essay](#), "Just Say No To blackface: Neo Minstrelsy and the Power to Dehumanize," as a "part of a history of dehumanization, of denied citizenship, and of efforts to excuse and justify state violence."

"Blackface is never a neutral form of entertainment, but an incredibly loaded site for the production of damaging stereotypes...the same stereotypes that undergird individual and state violence, American racism, and centuries worth of injustice."

The movie, which was only shown for two days after receiving backlash from American critics for Oliver's blackface, later received eight Oscar nominations.

Addressing his preliminary apology, Sheng [reportedly](#) acknowledged that his response could have been better.

"In my formal apology letter to the entire composition division ... I merely attempt to say that I don't discriminate in retrospect, maybe I ought to have apologized for my mistake solely."

Bright Sheng, who teaches composition at the University of Michigan, was born in Shanghai, China in 1955. He is known to be a widely celebrated musician, pianist, composer and conductor. Sheng has earned many honors for his music and compositions, including a MacArthur "genius" Fellowship in 2001, and has twice been a runner-up finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

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Sen. Josh Hawley Tells Religious Conservatives US Needs a 'Baptism of Hope' - Report
By - Adriana Montes

The Missouri senator reportedly spoke about the DOJ's recent memo and the Supreme Court hearing an abortion case in December.

Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO) advised a gathering of religious conservatives on Friday that the faithful need a "baptism of courage" as they encounter new pressures from the left, media [reported](#).

"I just want to say to you that it's my firm conviction that in this hour, in this time of testing, for our nation and for us as believers, what we need as believers above all is we need a baptism of courage," Hawley said at the Pray Vote Stand Summit in Leesburg, Va.

"And we also need a baptism of hope because it's hope that gives us courage."

The gathering of devoted conservatives included an audio system lamenting the Justice Division's current attempt to probe intimidation at college boards.

Meanwhile, Hawley has [reportedly](#) sent a letter to the attorney general expressing concern that the DOJ will restrict parental free speech with its new investigation.

"Not on my watch and not without a fight," Hawley reportedly said at Friday's event. "I'm not going to face by. I can't stand idly by whereas this administration makes use of the federal authorities towards us. I can't stand by, whereas they trample our First Amendment rights."

The DOJ recently announced that it would coordinate a nationwide investigation after the National School Board Association (NSBA) suggested teachers face domestic terrorism. In it, the NSBA cited several instances of reported violence or intimidation.

Hawley has expressed concern towards the NSBA letter, which invoked the Patriot Act, and the potential for overreach following Garland's [memo](#), although it didn't use the term "domestic terrorist" and clarified that "spirited debate" was not the target of his probe.

The Missouri senator didn't miss the chance to request prayers from attendees for the Supreme Court until December 1, when oral arguments in *Dobbs v. Mississippi* are scheduled to be heard.

Hawley proceeded to describe the case as the most important [pro-life case in generations](#), and expressed hope that the Court would reverse *Roe v. Wade*.

"It is the worst decision certainly of this century," he reportedly said of *Roe*. "One of the absolute worst decisions in our country's history. It ranks right up there with *Dred Scott*, which extended slavery all across this country and required a Civil War to destroy."

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Moon Rocks Retrieved by China's Chang'e-5 Mission Show Lunar Volcanic Activity 2 Bln Years Ago

By - Adriana Montes

The group found that the moon remained volcanically active longer than its size would indicate, when measuring the chemical and mineralogical compositions of the volcanic rocks.

Lava flowed across the moon's surface just 2 billion years ago, bits of lunar rock samples retrieved by China's Chang'e-5 mission reveal.

Chang'e-5 is the first mission to retrieve lunar rocks and return them to Earth in over 40 years.

A [chemical analysis](#) of the volcanic rocks published Thursday in the journal *Science*, confirms that the moon remained volcanically active far longer than its size would suggest possible, researchers at Beijing's Chinese Academy of Geological Sciences reported.

International authors led by researchers said the Chang'e 5 lunar mission collected samples of young lunar basalt lavas from the Oceanus Procellarum region.

"Orbital data indicate that the youngest volcanic units on the moon are basalt lavas in Oceanus Procellarum, a region with high levels of the heat-producing elements potassium, thorium and uranium," the team wrote.

Alexander Nemchin, a geochemist at Curtin University and a co-author of the study [reportedly](#) said that previous moon missions retrieved plenty of lunar soil and rocks, but "nothing younger than around 3.1 billion years old."

"Now it seems we can at least start to fill in that gap with this young basalt," he added.

China's Chang'e 5, the third Chinese probe to land on the moon, landed Tuesday on the Sea of Storms on the moon's near side.

Its main task was to drill a 2-metre core of rock to collect samples about 170 kilometers East-northwest of Mons Rümker — a large volcanic complex — and use radioactive dating to determine the age.

The moon formed roughly 4.5 billion years ago. Lunar rocks from the Apollo and Soviet missions in the 1960s and 1970s [revealed](#) that volcanism on the moon occurred for the first billion years of its existence, with flows lasting for hundreds of millions of years.

The study did not show an abundance of radioactive elements that would have provided the heat necessary for late volcanism to occur, and scientists are still unaware of why lava was flowing on the moon so long after it formed.

The findings are compelling scientists to consider what other forces could have maintained volcanic activity on the moon.

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US Official to Visit Haiti, Panama October 12-16 for Talks on Migration - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - A senior US official will travel to Haiti and Panama to meet and discuss with government officials issues concerning migration and security, the Department of State said in a press release.

"Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights Uzra Zeya will travel to Haiti and Panama from October 12–16, 2021," the release said on Friday.

In Haiti, Zeya will meet with Prime Minister Ariel Henry to participate in a Haitian-led dialogue to ensure free and fair elections, security for all its Haitian citizens, and support for returning Haitian migrants.

Moreover, the release said, Zeya will also meet with Haitian Minister of Justice Liszt Quitel to discuss the investigation into President Jovenel Moise's assassination and the Bel-Air, La Saline, and Grand Ravine massacres.

Zeya will also meet officials with the United Nations' International Organization for Migration and with the UN Children's Fund to discuss matters concerning migration, the release said.

In Panama City, Zeya will meet with Panamanian President Laurentino Cortizo and participate in high-level security talks on October 14, the release said. The meeting will focus on addressing regional migration challenges, money laundering and drug trafficking, the release said.

While in Panama, Zeya will also meet with international organizations, civil society, and non-governmental organizations to further collaborate on issues relating to security, providing international protection, and migration management, the release said.

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US Justice Dept. Declines to Charge Officer Over Shooting of Black Man in Wisconsin

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department said in a press release it will not pursue charges against a police officer that shot African American man Jacob Blake Jr. in the back seven times last year.

"The Justice Department announced today that it will not pursue federal criminal civil rights charges against a Kenosha Police Department (KPD) officer for his involvement in the Aug[ust] 23, 2020, shooting of 30-year-old Jacob Blake," the release said on Friday.

The Justice Department determined there is insufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the KPD officer willfully violated US law, so the case is closed.

In January, prosecutors in the state of Wisconsin also declined to file charges against the police officer involved in the shooting.

In August 2021, violent protests erupted in Kenosha, Wisconsin, after a police officer shot Blake Jr. The protests turned into riots complete with violence against police and civilians as well as acts of arson and destruction.

The shooting fueled unrest that had already been raging nationwide following the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed African American, while in police custody in the city of Minneapolis on May 25, 2020.

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Nuland to Travel to Moscow on October 11 for Talks With Senior Officials - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland will be traveling to Moscow on October 11 to meet with senior officials to discuss a range of bilateral, regional, and global issues, the State Department Spokesperson's office said in a statement.

"Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland will travel to Moscow, Russia on October 11 to meet with senior officials and other interlocutors to discuss a range of bilateral, regional, and global issues," the release said on Friday.

Nuland on October 14 will then travel to Beirut, Lebanon for meetings with members of Lebanese civil society and government leaders to talk about elections and economic reforms. On October 15, she will travel to London to speak with senior government officials about an array of issues.

In May of 2019, Nuland, who had been a senior state department official during the Obama administration, was denied a Russian visa because she was on a blacklist introduced as part of a tit-for-tat response to Washington's sanctions, according to the Russian Foreign Ministry. Nuland had applied for a Russian visa to take part in an international conference organized by the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), the German Council on Foreign Relations and Johns Hopkins University.

Last week, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said Nuland did not have a valid Russian entry visa but her potential visit was under consideration.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told reporters last month that Moscow and Washington were preparing a number of meetings at the level of the Foreign Ministry and the State Department.

Nuland, a US diplomat for 32 years, served as Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs during the Obama administration when she made headlines for passing out cookies to the participants of the Maidan and leaked phone conversations of her discussing appointments in a future government in Kiev.

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Trump Says New York Property Taxes Exceed His Park Avenue Retail Property Value

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's company Trump Park Avenue LLC is asking the New York Supreme Court to lower the property taxes on the retail space of his tower at 59th Street and Park Avenue, court documents revealed.

"The said assessments are excessive in that (a) the assessed valuation exceeds the full value of the real property," the court document said on Friday.

US media reported that Trump's Park Avenue retail property is currently estimated at about \$12.2 million in market value, which results in an annual property tax bill of \$520,000.

According to the court document, Trump's company argues the property value for his Park Avenue tower is substantially higher than the assessed value of other properties in New York City.

Trump's legal team claims the assessments are illegal because they have been wrongfully denied a hearing to correct the property value in question.

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US Condemns Mosque Attack in Afghanistan 'In Strongest Terms' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United States condemns in the strongest terms the latest attack on a Shia mosque in Afghanistan's northern Kunduz province, Afghanistan State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

"The United States condemns in the strongest terms today's attack on worshippers at Friday prayers in Kunduz, Afghanistan," Price said during a press briefing on Friday. "We offer our deepest condolences to the victims and their families. The Afghan people deserve a future free of terror."

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan said more than 100 people died in the explosion that ripped through the Shia mosque during Friday prayers.

Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Taliban (banned in Russia), said investigators were working at the scene of the explosion. Mujahid also said the explosion claimed the lives of compatriots.

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Biden Authorizes New Refugee Cap of 125,000 for Fiscal Year 2022, Sets Regional Limits

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden sent a memo to Secretary of State Antony Blinken authorizing a new refugee cap of 125,000 for Fiscal year 2022 due to humanitarian and national interests.

"By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States... and after appropriate consultations with the Congress, I hereby make the following determinations and authorize the following actions: The admission of up to 125,000 refugees to the United States during Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 is justified by humanitarian concerns or is otherwise in the national interest," Biden said on Friday.

He also set regional caps for five global regions, in addition to setting aside 10,000 spots to be allocated at a later date should the need arise. The authorization allows for 40,000 refugees from Africa, 15,000 from East Asia, 10,00 from Europe and Central Asia, 15,000 from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 35,000 for the Near East and South Asia in addition to the 10,000 unallocated spots.

Biden added that the State Department may, after notifying the Judiciary Committees of the Congress, transfer unused admissions allocated from one region to another if the needs of the regions shift.

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Facebook Says Fixed Issue That Caused Second Outage This Week

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Facebook issued a statement announcing it had resolved the issue that caused the outage earlier in the day making it the second major accident this week.

"Sincere apologies to anyone who wasn't able to access our products in the last couple of hours. We fixed the issue, and everything should be back to normal now," Facebook said via Twitter on Friday.

Earlier in the day, Facebook acknowledged its users were having trouble accessing the network's apps and products and said was working to restore service in the second major outage for the social media platform this week.

Facebook and other apps under the corporate umbrella, including Whatsapp and Instagram, experienced worldwide outages on Monday due to what the company's engineers described as a disruption in operations caused by configuration changes on backbone routers.

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US Approves Australia Buying 12 MH-60 Black Hawks For \$985Mln - Defense Security Agency
WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has approved a nearly \$1 billion sale of 12 Sikorsky MH-60R Black Hawk helicopters to Australia, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Australia of MH-60R Multi-Mission Helicopters, Related Defense Services, and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$985 million," the DSCA said in a press release on Friday.

The agency has delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale, the release said.

"The government of Australia has requested to buy twelve MH-60R Multi-Mission helicopters; 30 T-700-GE-401C engines; twelve APS-153(V) Multi-Mode Radars [and] twelve AN/AAS-44C(V) Multi-Spectral Targeting Systems," the release said.

The deal also includes 34 embedded Global Positioning System/Precise Positioning Service inertial navigation systems with selective availability and anti-spoofing module and 20 Link 16 multifunctional information distribution systems - joint tactical radio system, the release said. Australia will also buy in the same package 12 GAU-61 digital rocket launchers, 12 airborne low frequency sonars, 18 AN/AAR-47 missile warning systems, 18 AN/ALE-47 chaff and flare dispensers, electronic countermeasures and other equipment, the release added.

The proposed sale will improve Australia's capability to perform anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare missions along with the ability to perform secondary missions including vertical replenishment, search and rescue, and communications relay, according to the release.

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UPDATE - Biden Says OECD Global Tax Deal Forces Companies to Pay 'Fair Share' of Taxes

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The global minimum corporate tax rate of 15% agreed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) will finally commit companies to "paying their fair share" instead of nations undercutting one another in taxes, US President Joe Biden said Friday.

The global tax accord announced by the on Friday will "bring us one step closer to finally ending that race to the bottom, to ensure that profitable corporations pay their fair share, and provide governments with the resources to invest in their workers and economies", Biden said in a statement issued by the White House.

Race to the bottom describes countries undercutting one another on tax rates, in order to attract or retain economic activity.

Critics, including Biden, have severely criticized the practice as ultimately benefiting the world's richest corporations that often pay next to nothing on taxes in countries they operate while depriving governments of billions of dollars of capital needed for development.

Biden has particularly chafed at US-owned corporations that have changed their headquarters to international locations to escape paying American corporate taxes that are set at 21%. He has proposed raising the US rate and has made it his mantra that companies "pay their fair share."

"This race to the bottom hasn't just harmed American workers, it's put many of our allies at a competitive disadvantage as well," the president said in the White House statement.

The OECD reiterated the president's words in a statement it issued Friday.

"The global minimum tax agreement does not seek to eliminate tax competition, but puts multilaterally agreed limitations on it, and will see countries collect around USD 150 billion in new revenues annually," the OECD said.

It added that more than \$125 billion of profits from around 100 of the world's largest and most profitable multinational enterprises will be shared worldwide, "ensuring that these firms pay a fair share of tax wherever they operate and generate profits."

Until the agreement was announced Friday, there had been doubts whether enough countries would come on board with it. But the OECD said Friday that even Ireland — which had one of the lowest tax rates at 12.5% — had joined the accord. Other notable signatories were Hungary and Estonia, with tax rates of 15% and 20%, respectively.

Four countries — Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — have yet to join, the OECD said, without giving reasons.

The international community intends to sign the multilateral convention in 2022 and hopes to implement it in 2023.

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Trump Says Biden Request for Documents Related to January 6 'Not Based in Law or Reality'

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said in a statement that congressional Democrats' request to release documents related to Trump's communications and actions on January 6, approved on Friday by the Biden administration, are not based in law or reality.

"The Radical Left Democrats tried the Russia Witch Hunt, they tried the fake impeachments, and now they are trying once again to use Congress to persecute their political opponents. Their requests are not based in law or reality - it's just a game to these politicians. They don't care about our Country or the American people," Trump said in the statement on Friday.

The statement was issued following confirmation from the White House that they will release the requested documents from the National Archive to the US House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack, in defiance of a request from Trump's lawyers that they be withheld on the basis of executive privilege.

Earlier on Friday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki reiterated that the Biden administration fully plans to cooperate with the congressional committee's investigation into the events at the Capitol on January 6, including handing over the documents pertaining to Trump's actions and communications on that day.

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US Stocks Drop But Eke Out Weekly Gain After Mixed Jobs Report for September

NEW YORK, October 8 (Sputnik) - US stocks fell on Friday after an anemic jobs report for September still signaled a tapering of the Federal Reserve's pandemic-era stimulus before the end of the year.

But the three main equity indexes on Wall Street still managed to eke out a weekly gain, with the broad-based Dow Jones Industrial Average leading the pack with a rise of more than 1%, reacting to positive economic data earlier in the week.

"US stocks did not know how to react to a complex jobs report," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "An adequate jobs report continues to pave the way for the Fed to make a formal taper announcement at the November 3rd FOMC meeting."

FOMC, or Federal Open Market Committee, is the policymaking arm of the Federal Reserve. The Dow index finished Friday's session down 9 points, or 0.03%, at 34,748. For the week, it rose 1.2%.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, settled down 8 points, or 0.2%, at 4,391. The blue-chip indicator rose 0.8 on the week.

The Nasdaq Composite, comprising growth stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, closed down 75 points, or 0.5%, at 14,580. The tech barometer gained 0.1% on the week.

The US Labor Department reported on Friday a non-farm payrolls growth of 194,000 for September, versus the 235,000 for August and well below the forecast of 500,000.

The weak jobs growth was a sign to some that the Federal Reserve might take much longer to put into action the much-anticipated taper of its pandemic-era monthly stimulus of \$120 billion for the economy.

But the Labor Department also reported that the US unemployment rate fell to 4.8% from the August level of 5.2%.

The drop in the jobless rate is important as it closes in on the Federal Reserve's target of 4% for "full employment" - which central bank chair Jerome Powell has repeatedly used as a gauge for any monetary tightening to come.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* Three employees of the US Embassy, suspected of stealing personal belongings from a Russian citizen, should leave Russia if they refuse to lift their diplomatic immunity, the Russian Foreign Ministry told reporters.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* Ukrainian law enforcement officials have announced a new suspicion of treason and aiding terrorism to the chairman of the political council of Ukrainian party Opposition Platform - For Life, Viktor Medvedchuk, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said on Friday.

* Ruslan Stefanchuk, the first deputy head of the Ukrainian parliament, was promoted to the post of speaker, as 261 lawmakers voted to support him on Friday, above the 226-vote threshold.

NAVALNY CASE

- * Russia has prepared a counter-demarche at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in response to a letter from a number of countries regarding the situation with opposition figure Alexey Navalny, the Foreign Ministry said on Friday.
- * The technical secretariat of the OPCW confirmed the transfer of the list of Russia's questions on the incident with Navalny to the UK, Germany, France and Sweden, Russia's Permanent Representative to the OPCW Alexander Shulgin told Sputnik.
- * The French Foreign Ministry confirmed on Friday the receipt of the verbal note from Russia, sent in response to the request from member countries of the OPCW on the situation with Navalny.

EUROPEAN GAS MARKETS

- * Russia supplies gas to Europe according to signed contracts, and London's statement alleging that Moscow delivers less gas on purpose to accelerate approval of the Nord Stream 2 project is populism, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik on Friday.
- * The Kremlin strongly disagrees with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's claims that Russia uses its energy resources as a weapon, Peskov said.

BELARUS-POLAND BORDER SITUATION

- * A spokeswoman for the Polish border service, Anna Michalska, claimed on Friday that Belarusian border forces fired, most likely with rigged bullets, towards Polish guards.
- * Belarus State Border Committee spokesman Anton Bychkovsky said that the country's forces did not use weapons at the border perimeter in the past 24 hours.
- * The Belarusian Border Committee sent a request to Poland demanding to clarify Warsaw's statement about the alleged shooting at the border.

EXPLOSION IN AFGHANISTAN

- * A blast hit a Shia mosque in Afghanistan's northern Kunduz province on Friday, an eyewitness told Sputnik, adding that several people got injured during the accident.
- * The number of people killed following a blast in a Shia mosque in Afghanistan's northern Kunduz province surpassed 100, an eyewitness told Sputnik.

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US to Meet Taliban Officials in Doha This Weekend, Will Not Legitimize Group - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - A US delegation will travel to Doha, Qatar, over the weekend to meet with senior Taliban (banned in Russia) officials to discuss issues in Afghanistan, Reuters reported on Friday citing two Biden administration officials. The US delegation will be made up of officials from the State Department and the US intelligence community, the report said.

The topics of discussion at the meeting will be ensuring the safe passage of Americans and others out of Afghanistan, the release of US citizen Mark Frerichs, and warning about the potential resurgence of extremist groups, the report said.

US Special Representative for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad will not be included in the meeting, the report said.

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Biden Announces Diplomatic Nominees for Disarmament Conference, Vatican - White House

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden announced several nominations for key diplomatic positions including ambassadors to the Vatican and the Conference on Disarmament, the White House said on Friday in a press release.

Among the nominees announced were Bruce Turner for US Representative to the Conference on Disarmament and Joseph Donnelly for Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See.

Turner's most recent role at the State Department was as Senior Bureau Official of the Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance. He also served as Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Verification, Planning and European Security.

The Conference on Disarmament at which he will represent the US is an international forum for negotiating arms control and disarmament agreements, including in the realm of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

Donnelly, who now works at a Washington law firm, previously served as both a US Senator and Representative for the state of Indiana in addition to working as a professor at the Catholic Notre Dame University, from which he graduated.

The White House also announced Biden's Mari Carmen Aponte as nominee for an ambassador position to Panama, George Tsunis to Greece, and Douglas Hickey to Finland.

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Biden Admin. Considering Executive Order to Crack Down on Cryptocurrencies - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration may soon issue an executive order to develop a plan to regulate cryptocurrencies in the US financial system, Bloomberg News reported on Friday citing people familiar with the matter.

The executive order would direct multiple federal agencies to review and suggest actions to regulate cryptocurrencies, especially in the area of national security, the report said.

Earlier on Friday, a group of US lawmakers sent a letter to several top Biden administration officials urging them to strengthen coordination on the issue of cryptocurrency facilitating ransomware cyberattacks.

Last month, US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) Chairman Gary Gensler said too many investors have already been hurt in the loosely-regulated crypto industry.

In addition, the Treasury Department previously expressed concern about wealthy Americans shifting taxable assets into the crypto economy to avoid paying taxes. The crypto economy in the future could account for a significant portion of the \$7 trillion US "tax gap" - which is the difference between taxes paid and taxes owed, according to the Treasury Department.

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US Intelligence Community Has Not Determined Cause of 'Havana Syndrome' Yet – White House

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) – The US intelligence community's investigation into the cause of the so-called "Havana Syndrome" in American embassies has not yet determined any cause, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said on Friday amid reports that there was no malicious actor behind diplomatic personnel falling ill overseas.

"[T]he intelligence community is in the lead on that [investigation]. They have launched a large-scale investigation into the potential causes. They are actively examining a range of hypotheses, but they have not made a determination about the cause of these incidents, or who is responsible," Psaki said at a press briefing.

Earlier in the day, President Joe Biden signed into law a measure that provides compensation to the US diplomatic personnel whose health has been affected by the so-called "Havana Syndrome."

US diplomats were first diagnosed with the Havana syndrome in Cuba in 2016 and then in China in 2018. The diplomats said they experienced piercing sounds that have caused longer-term health effects. US diplomats in Russia, Tajikistan, Austria and several African countries have also reported having experienced Havana syndrome symptoms, including nausea and dizziness.

The veracity of the "Havana Syndrome" incidents has been recently challenged by a new study completed by the JASON advisory group, a scientific advisory body, at the request of the US State Department in September. The researchers concluded that no single energy source is capable of producing both the recorded audio/video signals, and bring about the reported health effects. Moreover, the JASON group believes the sounds are biological in origin and most likely come from local crickets' mating calls.

The US government initially blamed Russia for what it said were "acoustic attacks," but the allegations have been dismissed by Moscow as absurd. In July, CIA Director William Burns said Russia may be responsible for the incidents, but the US government lacks proof to have a final determination.

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Blinken Says US, Mexico to Deepen Cooperation on Resolving Disappearance Cases

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and Mexico will deepen their cooperation to resolve thousands of missing person cases in Mexico and to crack down on arms trafficking between the two countries, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday. "We're expanding through our partnership efforts to resolving tens of thousands of cases of disappearances and missing persons in Mexico," Blinken said during a press conference alongside his Mexican counterpart Marcelo Ebrard. "The second pillar is on preventing trafficking across borders. We know that reducing arms trafficking is a priority for Mexico as many of the illicit weapons in this country [Mexico] come from the United States." Blinken pointed out that the United States and Mexico will deepen their cooperation on arms tracing, investigations and prosecutions to disrupt arms trafficking. The two neighboring countries will also deepen cooperation to combat money laundering and other forms of corruption to crack down on transnational criminal networks, Blinken said. Overall, the first high-level US-Mexico security dialogue on Friday was very productive. The two sides discussed matters on security, immigration, trade, and public health, he added. The Mexican foreign secretary said the success of this new initiative will be measured through the reduction of homicides and crime in Mexico.

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Biden Tells OECD Global Tax Deal Forces Companies to Pay 'Fair Share' of Taxes

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The global minimum corporate tax rate of 15% agreed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) will finally commit companies to "paying their fair share" instead of nations undercutting one another in taxes, US President Joe Biden said Friday. The global tax accord announced by the on Friday will "bring us one step closer to finally ending that race to the bottom, to ensure that profitable corporations pay their fair share, and provide governments with the resources to invest in their workers and economies", Biden said in a statement issued by the White House. Race to the bottom describes countries undercutting one another on tax rates, in order to attract or retain economic activity. Critics, including Biden, have severely criticized the practice as ultimately benefiting the world's richest corporations that often pay next to nothing on taxes in countries they operate while depriving governments of billions of dollars of capital needed for development. Biden has particularly chafed at US-owned corporations that have changed their headquarters to international locations to escape paying American corporate taxes that are set at 21%. He

has proposed raising the US rate and has made it his mantra that companies “pay their fair share.”

“This race to the bottom hasn't just harmed American workers, it's put many of our allies at a competitive disadvantage as well,” the president said in the White House statement.

The OECD reiterated the president's words in a statement it issued Friday.

“The global minimum tax agreement does not seek to eliminate tax competition, but puts multilaterally agreed limitations on it, and will see countries collect around USD 150 billion in new revenues annually,” the OECD said.

It added that more than \$125 billion of profits from around 100 of the world's largest and most profitable multinational enterprises will be shared worldwide, “ensuring that these firms pay a fair share of tax wherever they operate and generate profits.”

Until the agreement was announced Friday, there had been doubts whether enough countries would come on board with it. But the OECD said Friday that even Ireland — which had one of the lowest tax rates at 12.5% — had joined the accord. Other notable signatories were Hungary and Estonia, with tax rates of 15% and 20%, respectively.

Four countries — Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — have yet to join, the OECD said, without giving reasons.

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US in Close Contact With Mexico on Irregular Haitian Migration - Blinken

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is in close touch with its Mexican counterparts regarding the issue of illegal migration from Haiti, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.

“We are in very close daily contact with our colleagues in Mexico on the question of irregular Haitian migration, some of which is coming from Haiti itself and some of which is coming from other countries in our hemisphere where Haitians have resided for some time and now seek to come to the United States,” Blinken said.

Blinken said the United States is determined to fully respect the human rights and the dignity of all people as it enforces its laws.

A devastating earthquake hit Haiti in August resulting in the death of more than 2,000 people and much material damage and has also suffered a prolonged period of poverty, gang violence and political crisis following the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in July.

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Facebook Says Aware of Second Outage in a Week, Working to Restore Service

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Social media site Facebook says that it is aware of reports of users having trouble accessing their apps and products and is working to restore service in the second major outage for the platform this week, the company said on Friday in a tweet.

"We're aware that some people are having trouble accessing our apps and products. We're working to get things back to normal as quickly as possible and we apologize for any inconvenience," Facebook said in a tweet.

Facebook and other apps under the corporate umbrella including Whatsapp and Instagram experienced worldwide outages on Monday due to what the company's engineers described as a disruption in operations caused by configuration changes on backbone routers.

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January 6 Panel Says Ex-Trump Chief of Staff Meadows to Testify, Bannon Refuses

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows and former Pentagon chief of staff Kash Patel will testify before the House committee investigating the January 6 Capitol riot, but longtime Trump ally Steven Bannon is defying the subpoena, panel Chairman Bennie Thompson and Vice Chair Liz Cheney said in a joint statement on Friday.

"While Mr. Meadows and Mr. Patel are, so far, engaging with the Select Committee, Mr. [Steven] Bannon has indicated that he will try to hide behind vague references to privileges of the former President," the statement said. "The Select Committee fully expects all of these witnesses to comply with our demands for both documents and deposition testimony."

The heads of the committee said they will consider issuing criminal referrals to subpoenaed individuals who refuse to cooperate.

On Thursday, US media reported that Trump's lawyer asked his former officials under subpoena to not provide testimony or documents in the investigation and to invoke executive privilege.

Meadows, Patel, Bannon, and former White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications Daniel Scavino were required to provide all requested documents to the committee by Thursday and are expected to testify before the panel on October 14 and 15.

On January 6, Trump supporters stormed the Capitol in Washington, in an effort to prevent certification of Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election. As a result of the riot, a protester and a policeman were killed, and three more died from causes unrelated to the violence.

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Biden Blocks Trump Request to Withhold Documents Related to January 6 Riot - White House

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has blocked former President Donald Trump's request to withhold documents pertaining to the January 6 riots at the US Capitol complex from a congressional investigative committee, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Friday.

"The administration takes the events of January 6 very seriously, as the President said on its six month anniversary... The President's dedicated to ensuring that something like that could never happen again, which is why the administration is cooperating with ongoing investigations, including the January 6 Select Committee to bring to light what happened," Psaki said during a press briefing. "As a part of this process, the President has determined that an assertion of executive privilege is not warranted for the first set of documents from the Trump White House that have been provided to us by the National Archives."

Psaki in September foreshadowed the official decision not to withhold the records when she said that Biden would not resort to executive privilege with respect to Trump's activities and communications on January 6, and planned to provide all necessary information.

The decision authorizes the National Archives to hand over documents requested by the US House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th attack. The documents contain information regarding Trump's actions and communications throughout the day on January 6.

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UNGA President to Attend Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Serbia Saturday - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, October 8 (Sputnik) - UN General Assembly President, Abdulla Shahid, will travel to Belgrade, Serbia, on October 9 to take part in a commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement, his spokesperson Monica Grayley said in a press briefing on Friday.

"President Abdulla Shahid will arrive in Serbia tomorrow for the last part of his first official trip since taking office. The PGA will speak at the opening of the high-level commemorative meeting to mark the 60th anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement," Grayley said.

Shahid received a joint invitation to the event from Azerbaijan and Serbia, Grayley pointed out. During his trip, Shahid will meet several government officials and the UN country team, she said.

Shahid will also hold a bilateral meeting with Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic.

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Former Afghan Leader Abdullah Says Internal Flaws, US-Taliban Deal Weakened Government

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Numerous internal problems with the administration of former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in conjunction with the fallout from the US peace deal

with the Taliban (banned in Russia) led to the collapse of the Afghan government, former head of the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah said on Friday.

"I would say that there were so many flaws in our own system, there is no doubt about it. Bad elections one after another. Ghani not trusting the people, and the sense of mistrust between him and all the leaders in the country, which was him to be blamed for it in most parts," Abdullah said at the India Today Conclave 2021. "At the same time, when the United States signed a deal with the Taliban earlier, the Doha Agreement, the peace element of it was very weak."

Abdullah explained the fact that the agreement contained a precise date by which US troops promised to depart Afghanistan led to the demoralization of Afghan forces. He also criticized the decision to agree to an unconditional withdrawal without achieving peace between the Taliban and the Afghan government first.

On Wednesday, US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John Sopko said his office is investigating allegations that Ghani fled Afghanistan with millions of dollars following the collapse of his government.

Afghan broadcaster 1TV reported on Wednesday that the presidential administration, the security directorate and former Vice President Amrullah Saleh had joined forces to siphon funds from the country's banks a week before Ghani's escape. They are alleged to have illegally transferred and laundered large sums of the money.

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UN Chief Condemns 'Barbaric' Attack on Mosque in Afghanistan - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, October 8 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has condemned the "barbaric" attack on a Shia mosque in Afghanistan's northern Kunduz province, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan said more than 100 people died in the explosion that ripped through the Shia mosque during Friday prayers.

"The Secretary-General... condemns this barbaric attack. He extends his condolences to all the victims and the families of those who were wounded," Dujarric said.

Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Taliban (banned in Russia), said investigators were working at the scene of the explosion, Mujahid also said the explosion claimed the lives of compatriots.

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US Supreme Court Has Until Late June to Rule on Tsarnaev Case

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) – The US Supreme Court will have until late June to rule on the Boston bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev case after the Justice Department requested to

reinstate his death sentence, a Supreme Court spokesperson told Sputnik on Friday, Supreme court spokesperson told Sputnik on Friday.

"No one knows exactly when a decision will be handed down by the Court in an argued case, but in general, a case will be decided during the Term in which it is argued. The Court's Terms usually end in late June," the spokesperson said.

The court will begin considering Tsarnaev's case on October 13, he added.

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who carried out a bomb attack at the 2013 Boston Marathon alongside his older brother Tamerlan, was sentenced to death by a jury in 2015. Last year, however, a federal appeals court overturned the sentence, arguing that prospective jurors had not been questioned by the court about whether they had prior biases about the case before the trial began.

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Biden Signs Bill to Study, Curtail Cybersecurity Risks at US Schools – White House

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden has signed a bill requiring the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to study and prevent possible risks at American elementary and secondary schools, the White House announced on Friday.

"On Friday, October 8, 2021, the President signed into law: S. 1917, the 'K-12 Cybersecurity Act of 2021,' which requires the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to study the cybersecurity risks facing elementary and secondary schools and develop recommendations that include voluntary guidelines designed to assist schools in facing those risks," the White House said in a press release.

The bill was originally introduced by Republican Senator Rick Scott and later joined by other senators and representatives, including Jacky Rosen and Jim Langevin.

The K-12 Cybersecurity Act requires CISA to complete a study of potential cybersecurity risks that elementary and secondary schools are facing, including risks related to protecting sensitive student and employee records, and remote learning. After the study will be completed, CISA is supposed to provide cybersecurity recommendations and a web tool to facilitate school security against possible hackings.

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Guterres Asks to Postpone Friday's UN-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, October 8 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has asked that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) ministerial meeting, originally set to take place virtually on Friday, be postponed, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

"The Secretary-General has requested that the ASEAN-UN ministerial meeting be postponed. We are liaising with the Chair of ASEAN in further consultations of the format of the meeting," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

Earlier in the month, a number of ASEAN member states, including Singapore and Malaysia, expressed disappointment at the lack of commitment to a peace plan from Myanmar's military leadership and voiced concern about its leader participating in the summit.

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US, Mexico Launch New High-Level Security Dialogue in Mexico City on Friday

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and Mexico on Friday launched the new high level security dialogue in the Mexican capital to discuss shared challenges that include drug trafficking and immigration, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a roundtable meeting with his Mexican counterpart Marcelo Ebrard.

"I know I speak for all my colleagues when I say how pleased we are to launch this new framework," Blinken said. "After 13 years of the Merida Initiative, it's time for a comprehensive new approach to our security cooperation."

The Merida Initiative was launched by former US President George W. Bush and then-Mexican President Felipe Calderon in 2007. Under the pact, the United States provided Mexican security forces with aircraft, helicopters and training, which accumulated to a \$3 billion price tag, according to the Congressional Research Service.

The US and Mexican delegations will discuss ways to enhance cooperation on law enforcement, rule of law, corruption, public health and trade, Blinken said.

Blinken underscored the need to prioritize efforts to disrupt drug cartel groups responsible for most of the crime in Mexico and drug trafficking into the United States.

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador will meet with Blinken later on Friday.

Blinken is joined by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, US Attorney General Merrick Garland, Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols and National Security Council Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere Juan Gonzalez.

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Biden Signs Bill to Compensate US Personnel Affected by 'Havana Syndrome' - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Friday announced that he signed into law a measure that provides compensation to the US diplomatic personnel whose health has been affected by the so called "Havana Syndrome."

"Today, I was pleased to sign the HAVANA Act into law to ensure we are doing our utmost to provide for US Government personnel who have experienced anomalous health incidents," Biden said in a statement.

Biden added that the federal employees who are struggling with brain injuries that have curtailed their careers will also get first-class medical care while the US government is investigating the cause of the alleged attacks.

US diplomats were first diagnosed with the Havana syndrome in Cuba in 2016 and then in China in 2018. The diplomats said they experienced piercing sounds that have caused longer-term health effects. US diplomats in Russia, Tajikistan, Austria and in several African countries have also reported to have experienced Havana syndrome symptoms, including nausea and dizziness.

The US government initially blamed Russia for what it said were "acoustic attacks," but the allegations have been dismissed by Moscow as absurd. In July, CIA Director William Burns said Russia may be responsible for the incidents, but the US government lacks proof to have a final determination.

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International Criminal Court Asks Guterres to Identify Afghanistan's Representation at UN

UNITED NATIONS, October 8 (Sputnik) - The International Criminal Court (ICC) on Friday requested UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to make a decision as to who is representing Afghanistan at the world body.

"Today, 8 October 2021, Pre-Trial Chamber II of the International Criminal Court (the 'Court') decided to request the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Bureau of the Assembly of States Parties of the Court to submit information on the identification of the authorities currently representing the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," the ICC said in a statement. The Chamber asked Guterres and the ICC legislative body to identify Afghanistan's representation to allow the court to continue its investigation into war crimes committed in the country.

The Taliban (banned in Russia) seized control of Afghanistan on August 15. Former President Ashraf Ghani has fled the country and on September 7, Afghanistan announced the forming of a new government led by Mullah Mohammad Hassan, who is on the United Nations sanctions list. During the recent UN General Assembly, the Taliban requested that its representative speaks in the high-level General Debate, instead of Afghanistan's Ambassador to the United Nations Ghulamnabi Isaczkai, who was appointed by Ghani.

However, on the day that Afghanistan was scheduled to speak at the UN General Assembly, it withdrew its participation.

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US Court Reschedules Sentencing of Russian National Grichishkin for October 14 - Clerk

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The US District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan rescheduled the sentencing of Russian national Aleksandr Grichishkin from October 8 to October 14, the clerk of the court told Sputnik on Friday.

"[The hearing] will be continuing next week. It is going to be October 14 at 1:30 p.m. Detroit time (5:30 p.m. GMT)," the clerk said.

Grichishkin was convicted for conspiring to engage in racketeering, influence or corrupt organization as well as bank fraud conspiracy. He reached a plea agreement with the US government in March.

In a sentencing memorandum issued in August, the US government described Grichishkin as a leader of organization that helped criminals deploy malware and steal money from others for approximately seven years.

The US Justice Department said Grichishkin operated under a variety of online aliases and instructed other members of the group on how to change IP-addresses and what to do in order to "clean up" their history.

During a hearing on August 18, Grichishkin expressed remorse for his crimes and asked the court to allow him early deportation in order to reunite with the family as soon as possible. Grichishkin and Andrei Skvortsov from Russia, Aleksandr Skorodumov from Lithuania and Pavel Stassi from Estonia were members of a hosting organization that allegedly helped a number of cybercriminals to evade detection by US law enforcement after they caused millions of dollars in losses to victims in the United States, the Justice Department said.

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US Envoy to Meet With Yemen Government, Civil Society During Visit to Region - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy Tim Lenderking will meet with representatives of the Yemen government and civil society as well as with United Nations officials during his visit to various countries in the region that commenced this week, the State Department said on Friday.

"US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking arrived in Jordan today. He will then travel on to the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. Special Envoy Lenderking will meet with the Republic of Yemen government, Yemeni civil society representatives, regional senior government and UN officials, and other international partners," the State Department said in a press release.

Lenderking will continue to advocate to bring stable peace and humanitarian relief to the millions of people in Yemen, including bringing an end to restrictions on fuel imports and alleged Houthi fuel price gouging, the release said.

The US Special Envoy will also focus on the consequences of the ongoing Houthi offensive in the Marib province that is preventing a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the country, the release added.

Yemen's conflict between government forces and the Houthi movement has been ongoing since August 2014. The situation in the country was further complicated after Saudi Arabia joined the conflict on the side of the Yemen government in 2015 and began conducting air, land and sea operations against the Islamist rebel movement.

Since February 2020, the Houthi rebels have been conducting a large-scale military operation to seize the Marib province, which is an important political, military and economic center that hosts the defense ministry's headquarters.

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Most Americans Worry Over Misinformation Crisis, Blame Social Media - Poll

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Some 81% of Americans view the spread and dissemination of misinformation as a major national problem and many blame the social media for propagating it, a new opinion poll revealed on Friday.

Some 81% of Americans view the spread of misinformation as a major problem and 14% of them as a lesser problem, the poll carried out by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, the Associated Press (AP) and the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts said.

In particular, 91% of those polled also blamed the social media companies for the spread of misinformation and an even higher number - 93%, blamed both the users and consumers of social media products and services as well, the poll results showed.

Also, 41% of Americans said they are very or extremely worried that they have been personally exposed to misinformation. However, less than half that number, some 20% are concerned that they may personally have spread it, the poll results showed.

Younger Americans are more likely than older ones to worry that they may have spread misinformation personally, the poll results also showed.

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US Legislators Urge Biden Admin. to Address Role of Crypto in Ransomware Attacks - Letter

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - A group of US legislators on Friday sent a letter to several top Biden administration officials urging them to strengthen coordination on the issue of cryptocurrency facilitating ransomware cyberattacks.

"We write to urge the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of the Treasury, the Department of State, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to pursue all options available to protect American communities and infrastructure from the growing threat of ransomware," the letter said. "In particular, we believe that stronger coordination between your

departments is necessary, especially to address the role of cryptocurrency in facilitating ransomware attacks."

US Senators Edward Markey and Sheldon Whitehouse as well as Congressmen Ted Lieu and James Langevin co-signed the letter addressed to the four heads of the aforementioned departments.

The lawmakers said the proliferation of cryptocurrency has caused a significant rise in ransomware attacks by offering an easy, fast way to launder stolen money and argued for increasing enforcement of existing money laundering and financial crimes statutes to deter more attacks and recover payments.

The lawmakers noted the difficulties law enforcement encounters in trying to recover money obtained through foreign ransomware attacks, saying the attackers frequently reside in countries that have actively or tacitly supported ransomware attacks such as Russia, China and North Korea.

The letter lists eight questions to which the congressmen requested answers by October 29, including how does the Biden administration work with allies to develop norms and best practices to enforce laws related to illicit financial transactions involving cryptocurrency and what resources are needed from Congress to better coordinate cooperation.

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Global Tax Pact Will Be Finalized in Coming Weeks to Stop 'Race to the Bottom' - Yellen
WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The global agreement on taxation to prevent countries from undercutting one another with lowest rates will be finalized in the coming weeks, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Friday.

"Finally, we are on the precipice of a historic tax agreement that signals a new era of multilateralism," Yellen said in a speech prepared for delivery at the B20, a business summit of the G20 group of countries, hosted virtually by Italy. "This agreement will be finalized in the coming weeks, and foreign-headquartered multinational corporations will face a minimum tax in all places they do business, just like US-headquartered multinational corporations do now."

The G-7, representing the world's seven wealthiest countries, agreed in June to impose a global minimum tax on corporate foreign earnings. The G20 has also supported the pact endorsed by as many as 134 countries representing more than 90% of the world's gross domestic product. Since the pact was announced in June, Yellen has personally lobbied officials across the world to revamp their tax systems to create a more equitable structure that would prevent countries from undercutting one another on tax rates, in order to attract or retain economic activity.

"The international tax agreement will stop the four-decade long race to the bottom on corporate taxation - where tax authorities offer lower tax rates to attract business, leading others to respond with lower rates," Yellen said. "In practice, this has deprived our nations of important resources and increased the tax burden on workers."

Nearly 140 countries, including Ireland and Estonia, which have among the lowest tax rates, are expected to settle on a 15% minimum tax under the global plan.

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US Allocates \$1Mln to Small Nuclear Reactor Development Program - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The US government has allocated an additional \$1 million in funding to the State Department's program to develop small nuclear reactor projects around the world, spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement released on Friday.

"Acting Assistant Secretary for International Security and Nonproliferation Dr. Eliot Kang announced the allocation of \$1 million in additional US government funding to the Department of State's Foundational Infrastructure for Responsible Use of Small Modular Reactor Technology (FIRST) program," the statement said.

The State Department launched the program in April to help partner countries develop nuclear energy programs and to support clean energy goals under the highest international standards for nuclear safety, security and nonproliferation, the statement said.

The State Department has committed \$5.3 million in initial funding to support the program's projects, the statement said.

Small modular reactors are a form of nuclear fission reactors that are significantly smaller than traditional nuclear reactors, and can be built at one location and then transferred to another. The International Atomic Energy Agency in 2018 called them among the most promising emerging technologies in nuclear power.

Kang made the announcement at a workshop on small modular reactors sponsored by the US Trade and Development Agency. The workshop included participants from throughout the European Union, who discussed the benefits of next generation nuclear technologies and their role in supporting energy security and climate ambitions.

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Over 800 Opposition Activists Remain in Prison in Belarus - United Nations

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has received reports that more than 800 opposition activists remain imprisoned in Belarus, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris said on Friday.

"We note that many [people] have fled the country since the 2020 presidential elections. In addition, reports have been received of over 800 individuals being imprisoned in Belarus because of their opinions," Brands Kehris said during the UN Security Council Arria-formula meeting on the situation in Belarus.

Brands Kehris expressed concern over what she was were increasing restrictions in Belarus and accused the government of suppressing independent media, civil society and dispersing peaceful protests.

"In this still deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus, I reiterate our call once again on the government of Belarus to cease their activity and policy of intimidating and harassing civil society and media workers. Those still detained should be released immediately," Brands Kehris said.

Relations between Belarus and the West have been deteriorating since the re-election of President Alexander Lukashenko in August of 2020. The opposition continues to insist that its candidate, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, won the election. The European Union, United States and their partners have since introduced sanctions against Belarus for the alleged electoral fraud and crackdowns on post-election protests.

Minsk has repeatedly stated that it is Western countries that are to blame for the protests in Belarus.

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Biden Signs Bill to Compensate US Personnel Affected by 'Havana Syndrome' - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Friday announced that he signed into law a measure that provides compensation to the US diplomatic personnel whose health has been affected by the so called "Havana Syndrome."

"Today, I was pleased to sign the HAVANA Act into law to ensure we are doing our utmost to provide for US Government personnel who have experienced anomalous health incidents," Biden said in a statement.

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Trump Gave 'Misleading' Information on Financial State of His Hotel in Washington - Letter

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump provided misleading information about the financial situation of his Trump International Hotel in downtown Washington, the US House of Representatives Oversight Committee said in a letter on Friday. "By filing these misleading public disclosures, President Trump grossly exaggerated the financial health of the Trump Hotel," the letter said, as quoted by NBC.

The Oversight Committee said Trump reported that the hotel earned him more than \$150 million during his time in office but also lost more than \$70 million.

The hotel received \$3.7 million in payments from foreign governments and this fact violates the US Constitution, the Oversight Committee added.

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Supply Chain, Chips Shortage Issues to Be Felt 'Well Into 2022' - US Commerce Secretary

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - Supply-chain issues, including the shortage of microchips, are expected to be felt well into next year, US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said during an appearance on the CNBC network on Friday.

"There's no denying that it's a problem," Raimondo said when asked about the supply chain and semiconductor shortage issues that were holding up economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. "I think we're going to be feeling these effects well into 2022 and it's disruptive."

Raimondo said the problem with microchips was that they were manufactured almost entirely outside of the United States, particularly in Taiwan.

The Commerce Secretary said Congress had to urgently allocate funding for the \$52 billion plan she proposed in May to build between seven and ten new semiconductor plants in the United States.

"Everyone knows we need to make chips in America," Raimondo said. "I think American companies are willing to step up and guarantee demand, and then we need to stimulate domestic production. So, yes, we can get this done, but we have to get to work."

Leading automakers in the world, from Japan's Toyota to the US General Motors and Ford, have slashed production this year due to microchip shortages emanating from labor and other disruptions caused by the measures to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

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UN Chief Congratulates Russian, Filipino Journalists on Receiving Nobel Peace Prize

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday congratulated Maria Ressa, co-founder of the news website Rappler, and Dmitry Muratov, the editor-in-chief of Russia's Novaya Gazeta newspaper, on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. Ressa and Muratov were awarded the prize earlier on Friday "for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression."

"Congratulations Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov on your Nobel Peace Prize. This recognition is a reminder that no society can be free without journalists who can investigate wrongdoing and speak truth to power. Press freedom is vital for peace, justice and human rights," Guterres said via Twitter.

Malala Yousafzai, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate who received the award in 2014, also congratulated the journalists.

"Excited to congratulate journalists Maria Ressa and Dmitri Muratov. The Nobel committee rightly recognize their work to protect freedom of expression and promote a free press. We must keep fighting for our right to speak freely, challenge leaders and improve social systems," Yousafzai said via Twitter.

Muratov is the third Russian citizen to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1975, Soviet nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to promote human rights in the former Soviet Union and for disarmament and cooperation between all nations. In 1990, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was awarded the prize for playing a leading role in the changes in East-West relations.

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Over Half of Americans Support Mandating COVID-19 Vaccination for School Children - Poll
WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - More than a half of adults in the United States support introducing a mandate to vaccinate children 12 years of age or older who are willing to attend public schools in person, a new poll by Politico and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health revealed on Friday.

Fifty-four percent of Americans are in favor of a vaccine mandate for school children and this level of support has remained almost unchanged since June when 50% said they were in favor, according to a press release accompanying the poll.

Democrats and Republicans have different views regarding mandating vaccinations. Almost three quarters of Democrats and only 28% of Republicans say they would support a mandate, the release said.

At the same time, adults in households with children aged 12-17 are split in their attitude toward the measure and 49% of respondents said they would agree with such a mandate, the release also said.

The poll also showed that almost two thirds of African-Americans, 59% of Latinos and 51% of Whites support mandating vaccinations for schools, the release added.

The poll was conducted between September 28-October 3 among a representative sample of 1,008 US adults via telephone, according to the release.

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US Diplomat Sherman, Pakistani Foreign Minister Meet to Discuss Afghanistan - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 8 (Sputnik) - US Deputy State Secretary Sherman and Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi have discussed the issue of Afghanistan, as well as the US-Pakistani relations in Islamabad, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday.

"Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman met today in Islamabad with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and discussed areas of bilateral cooperation, the importance of the US-Pakistan relationship and the way forward in Afghanistan. Deputy Secretary Sherman emphasized the importance of a coordinated approach to Afghanistan and other issues vital to regional stability," Price said.

On Thursday, Sherman met Pakistani National Security Advisor Moeed Yusuf to discuss Afghanistan and "ways to advance cooperation across the bilateral relationship," Price added. The meetings are a part of Sherman's overseas trip, which started in Geneva, where he held talks on strategic stability with the Russian delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov.

Sherman also visited New Delhi, India, on October 6 for a series of bilateral meetings as well as for the India Ideas Summit. On October 7, Sherman traveled to the Indian city of Mumbai for talks with business and civil society.